

**Statement of Debra Shore**

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**Before the U.S. Senate Committee on  
Environment and Public Works**

**March 9, 2023**

Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee, for inviting me here today and for the opportunity to address your questions.

I want to start by affirming that EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment so that all communities across America have clean air, clean land, and clean water. The health and safety of those who have been affected by the Norfolk Southern train derailment is a top priority for me and for EPA. That is why, as soon as EPA was notified of the train derailment on Friday, February 3, EPA personnel were on-site in East Palestine within hours to support our state and local partners who were in the lead for emergency response efforts. Every day since, EPA has been boots-on-the-ground, working with our Federal partners and our partners across all levels of government in a bipartisan manner to help this community.

I have personally been in East Palestine listening to residents and have heard how devastating this derailment has been. They are understandably worried. Some are scared. And every time a train whistle blows, they are reminded of the trauma visited upon them by Norfolk Southern.

That is why we have used one of EPA's most powerful enforcement tools to hold Norfolk Southern accountable and to require the company to clean up the mess it made.

I want to be abundantly clear: the residents of the greater East Palestine community are not alone. EPA is with them and will continue to be with them for as long as it may take to ensure the health and safety of this community.

Since the derailment, EPA has been leading robust air-quality testing, using state-of-the-art technology, in and around East Palestine.

We are currently conducting 24/7 air monitoring at 21 stations throughout the community. I am pleased to report that since the fire was extinguished on February 8, EPA monitors have not detected any volatile organic compounds above established levels of health concerns.

While EPA is encouraged by the data, we recognize that the people of East Palestine still question the health and safety of their community and loved ones. In response, EPA has been assisting with indoor air screenings for homes through a voluntary screening program offered to residents to provide them with information and help restore their peace of mind.

As of March 4, approximately 600 homes have been screened through this program, and no detections of vinyl chloride or hydrogen chloride have been identified.

On the water side, Ohio EPA, in partnership with Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, local health agencies, and public water systems, continues to lead water sampling efforts. EPA is providing support to the state as needed.

What I have described so far summarizes EPA's ongoing efforts to protect the health and safety of those living in East Palestine, as well as in surrounding areas of Ohio and Pennsylvania, in the aftermath of this disaster. Now let me turn to how EPA is holding Norfolk Southern accountable and continuing close coordination of cleanup activities across all levels of government. On February 21, EPA issued a Unilateral Administrative Order to Norfolk Southern which includes a number of directives, including:

- Identifying and cleaning up contaminated soil and water resources;
- Attending and participating in public meetings at EPA's request and posting information online;
- Having the Company pay for EPA's costs for work performed under this order.

EPA is overseeing Norfolk Southern's cleanup work to ensure it is done to EPA's specifications. We will also ensure that it aligns with the company's workplans, all of which will be reviewed and approved by EPA. Those workplans will outline all steps necessary to clean up the environmental damage caused by the derailment. Most importantly, if the company fails to complete any of the EPA ordered actions, the agency will immediately step in, conduct the necessary work, and then force Norfolk Southern to pay triple the cost. EPA's order holds

Norfolk Southern accountable and facilitates in the transition from the multi-agency “emergency response” phase to a longer term clean up phase.

Throughout my 11 days spent on the ground in East Palestine, I have learned that this is a proud and resilient community. Those who live there and in surrounding areas of Ohio and Pennsylvania have roots that go back generations. We owe it to East Palestine and to all those in affected areas to restore these beautiful communities to the special places we know them to be. That is exactly what EPA is working to accomplish – all while continuing to work hand in hand with our partners at the local, state, and federal levels.

Again, thank you for inviting me here today. I look forward to the dialogue and answering your questions.